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**Secretariat memorandum**

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Agenda item: 6

PC052

Drafted: 16.02.15

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Performance of the Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern franchises in the London and South East area

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To note the recent performance of the Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern franchises in respect of construction works at London Bridge station and track works resulting from the Thameslink programme.

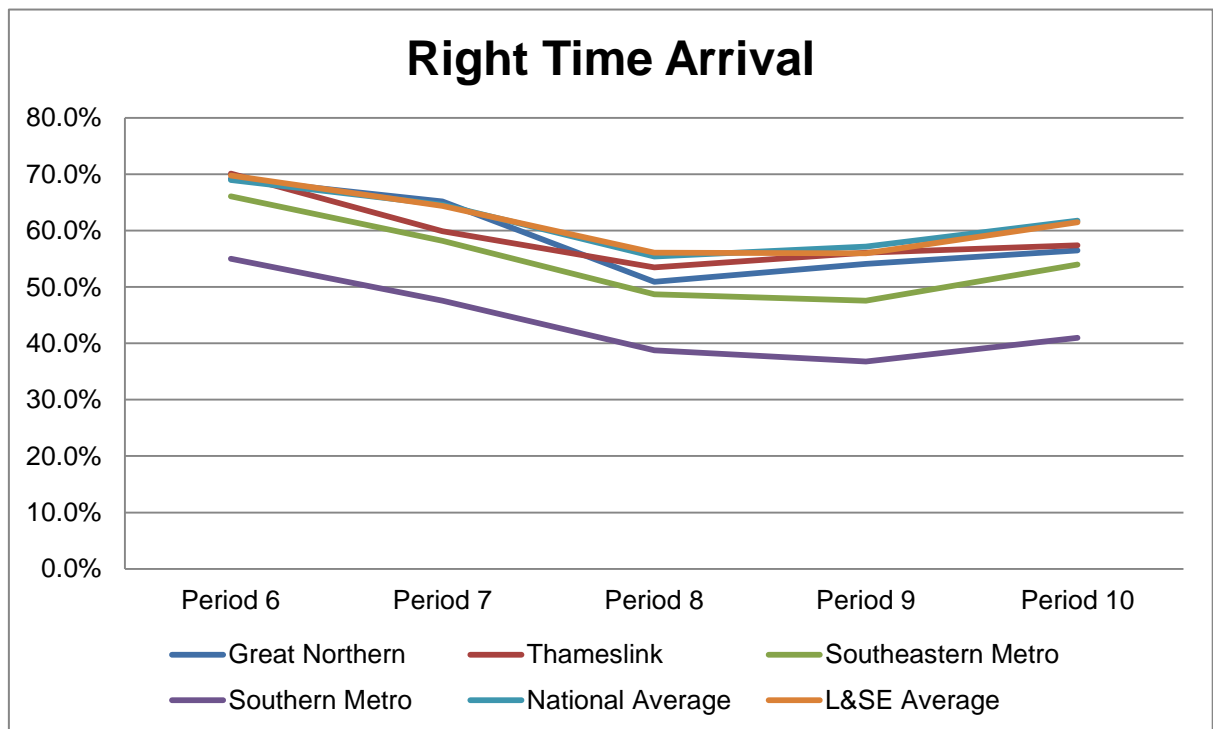
**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1. That members note the report.

**3 Performance data**

- 3.1. The performance of the Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern franchises is closely linked to, but not exclusively dependent on the rebuilding programme of London Bridge station and associated track works as a result of the Thameslink programme.
- 3.2. This only partially explains the poor performance of these franchises. The attached spreadsheet shows the performance of the three train operators plus South West Trains as a comparator (major commuter operator serving South London) over the period from September (period six) to early January (period 10) in 2014/15 and 2013/14.
- 3.3. The spreadsheet looks at right time arrival (RTA) and public performance measure (PPM) data. Right time arrival is a measure of the percentage of trains that arrive at their final destination either on time or early across the whole day. Right time is defined as less than one minute late and should not be confused with 'on time', as defined for public performance measure purposes. PPM is the percentage of planned trains which are run and which complete their journeys 'on time' across the whole day. Trains which complete their whole route calling at all timetabled stations are measured for punctuality at their final destination. In the case of London and South East services, a train is defined as being 'on time' if it arrives within five minutes of the planned arrival time. It does not include trains removed from the timetable on a planned basis.

- 3.4. The chart below shows the percentage of RTA in 2014/15, from periods 6 to 10 September to December. These are compared to the national and London & South East (L&SE) averages. It shows a decline in the operators' right time performance overall and when compared to the averages.



- 3.5. The spreadsheet includes a more detailed breakdown of figures and compares periods 6 to 10 in 2013/14 to the same periods in 2014/15 for the three operators alongside South West Trains as a comparator. The national and London & South East (L&SE) average for the corresponding periods are also shown.
- 3.6. Superficially, these figures would seem to show an improvement from last year to this. However, it should be remembered that in 2013/14 period 10 had severe weather (floods, storms etc.) whereas in 2014/15 period 10 has had no such major external factors reducing performance. This is shown by the rise in the PPM of South West Trains from 79.8% in 2013/14 to 88.8% in 2014/15 and 50.5% RTA in 2013/14 to 61.9% in 2014/15. The figures for Thameslink, Southern and Southeastern show only modest improvements in PPM and RTA between the two years.
- 3.7. The spreadsheet also shows a decline in RTA for each operator over the period between September 2014 and January 2015. This shows that the causes of poor performance are largely attributable to factors within the control of the industry. It should also be noted that if a train is removed from the timetable on a pre-planned basis (as is the case with some Southern services now withdrawn), that these cancellations do not count towards the PPM or RTA figures.

## 4 Sequence of events

- 4.1. From 16 to the 26 August 2014 a complete engineering blockade of the 'Southern' platforms of London Bridge took place. However, on 'hand back' a series of failures in the track and signalling equipment took place which had a major impact on the morning peak of 27 August 2014.
- 4.2. In addition, Southern found difficulty in operating parts of the agreed timetable, particularly in the peaks, on the new layout and so in the succeeding weeks a number of timetable changes were made to try and make the new timetable more reliable.
- 4.3. From 14 September 2014 services on the Thameslink and Great Northern routes were transferred from First Capital Connect to the new Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) franchise.
- 4.4. In the next two months service reliability of the new GTR franchise (both Thameslink and Great Northern routes), Southern and also Southeastern continued to be poor for a number of reasons, particularly poor performance by Network Rail, but also of things within the control of the operators (such as driver numbers, rostering issues and fleet availability). This was resulting in large numbers of cancellations of services on Sundays on the Great Northern route (because not enough drivers were able to work rest days and insufficient establishment) and other services (including Southern) such as those on the West London Line during the week in order to train drivers on the post-5 January 2015 layout of London Bridge station. London TravelWatch began to receive large numbers of complaints, appeals and tweets as a result.
- 4.5. Meetings with Southeastern and GTR took place on 16 and 19 December 2014 respectively. Following the meetings, London TravelWatch sent letters to Network Rail, the Department for Transport, GTR Thameslink and Southern expressing our concern about the substantive disruption that passengers were experiencing on their networks. In addition a press release was sent out expressing our concerns that was picked up by a number of media outlets.
- 4.6. A further engineering blockade of the 'Southern' side of London Bridge was implemented between 20 December 2014 and 4 January 2015. Whilst the hand back for this worked relatively well, it became apparent at an early stage that the timetable did not fit with the new layout (which reduced the numbers of approach tracks to London Bridge substantially) and that the passenger handling capabilities of some of the platforms and information screens was not as had been predicted again causing further major disruption. This resulted in significant cancellations and late running trains. As a result an additional departure screen was installed at London Bridge.
- 4.7. On 12 January 2015, a new timetable was brought into operation for all train operators, and this included the complete diversion of all through Thameslink trains from London Bridge and the withdrawal of stops at London Bridge in all Charing Cross services. There were inevitably some disruption for passengers arising from such a major change as passengers and staff adapted to the new timetable.

- 4.8. In the case of Southern it was still apparent that the timetable was not workable and so further changes including withdrawal of 50% of Forest Hill line stopping services in the evening peak were found to be necessary. This has led to further timetable changes from 19 and 26 January 2015, mostly involving extending journey times for performance reasons.
- 4.9. For Southeastern, crowding on the remaining Cannon Street services that call at London Bridge at peak times became a major issue. It is taking some while for passengers to adjust their journeys to take account of this change. The modelling of passenger behaviour assumed many passengers would change trains to reach their required London terminuses at stations further out from London such as Orpington, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge or Ashford International. However, it appears that many passengers are not following the advice and choosing to change trains at locations further into London such as Lewisham and Hither Green. The result is that there are now reports of passengers not being able to board trains at locations such as Lewisham, Ladywell, Hither Green, Grove Park and Greenwich, until up to two or three trains have departed full. This is exacerbated by a shortage of rolling stock making it impossible to lengthen trains from 8 or 10 cars to 12 cars where stations have sufficient platform length to do so.
- 4.10. Crowding has also become more problematic on other routes such as South West Trains between Clapham Junction and Waterloo, London Overground's East London Line, the Thameslink Wimbledon loop and Catford loop stopping services, and the Jubilee line, from passengers who previously used Southern services to London Bridge and then Southeastern to Waterloo East and Charing Cross. As with Lewisham and Hither Green, there are reports of passengers being unable to board successive trains. Bus services from south London into central London have also seen increases in use and crowding due to the continued unreliability of train services and the loss of connections at London Bridge.
- 4.11. As an emergency measure TfL has hired additional buses to operate routes 21 and 47 in the evening peak between London Bridge and Lewisham, route 381 between Waterloo and London Bridge in both peaks and a supplementary limited stop bus service at peak times for the Jubilee line between Waterloo and Canada Water calling only at London Underground stations. Anecdotal feedback to London TravelWatch has suggested that these buses were not well publicised or used and we will be taking this up with TfL.
- 4.12. London TravelWatch has continued to have a dialogue with each of the operators, DfT, Network Rail and TfL. We issued a press release on 14 January 2015 calling for further compensation particularly for users of Oyster and contactless cards within the London area, with automatic refunds and a reduction in the threshold for claims to a 15 minute or more delay.
- 4.13. London TravelWatch participated in round table meetings for MPs chaired by the Minister of State Claire Perry MP on the performance of Southeastern, Southern and GTR Thameslink on 20 January, 2 February and 4 February 2015 respectively.

- 4.14. We also supplied information to Heidi Alexander MP for her adjournment debate in the House of Commons on 25 January 2015 on the performance of South London rail services.
- 4.15. Since 12 January 2015 there has been some improvement to the reliability of services provided by these franchise operators. However, infrastructure failures still are a source of major concern. On 20 January 2015 a burst water main in Clerkenwell caused flooding of the tunnel used by Thameslink trains between Farringdon and St Pancras International. This reduced the capability of running trains over this section of route for a number of days, with consequent delays and cancellations.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1. The users of these franchises have over the past four months experienced very poor reliability and resilience of train services as a result of failures both by Network Rail and individual train operators. The causes of this are many, but include:
- Poor maintenance of key assets by Network Rail over a long period.
  - Over reliance on modelling of timetables and passenger flows within stations and using the network as a whole.
  - Failure to plan for an increased driver requirement ahead of a major timetable change.
  - Failure to manage the assets and basic information required for a successful handover of a franchise from one operator to another.
  - Failure to take account of stakeholder views on mitigation measures.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1. To continue pressure on the train operators, DfT and Network Rail to improve reliability and resilience of the rail network.
- 6.2. To press for an improved compensation package for passengers affected by the disruption, taking account the needs of Oyster/contactless card holders.
- 6.3. To seek early introduction of additional mitigation measures such as extra limited stop bus services in inner London, additional services on routes such as the Catford loop into central London and additional rolling stock to relieve crowding issues.

## **7 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 7.1. None – report is for information only.

## **8 Legal powers**

- 8.1. Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider - and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight). Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon the Committee to keep under review matters affecting the interests of the public in relation to railway passenger and station services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area, and to make representations about them to such persons as it thinks appropriate.

## **9 Financial implications**

- 9.1. None – report is for information only.